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SUBJECT: NINEWA: ADM TO PARTICIPATE IN PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS
DESPITE RESERVATIONS ABOUT ARTICLE 50

REF: BAGHDAD 3489

Classified By: Classified By: PRT Ninewa Team Leader Alex Laskaris for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT)
message.

¶1. (C) Summary: The Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) will participate in the upcoming provincial elections. Deacon Adid Yusif al-Sahq of Shaikhan said that ADM will contest the seat reserved for the Christian minority, although it has yet to decide whether it will field candidates for seats not reserved for minorities. According to Adid, the ADM still has a number of concerns about the fairness of Article 50 -- in particular, the advantages the law gives to the province's larger parties. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On December 1 in Ain Sifni (30 miles northeast of Mosul), ADM leader Adid told PRT staffs that the ADM will participate in upcoming provincial elections. The ADM has registered one candidate for the quota list, Salmi Habib Estifo, who is running under the Rafidain List. Adid said that the ADM decided to compete for the minority quota seat because they did not want to disenfranchise themselves as the Sunnis had done with their boycott of provincial elections in 2005.

¶3. (C) According to Adid, the ADM has decided to compete for the one Article 50-mandated seat reserved for Christians, but they have not decided whether to compete for seats open to all candidates. Contesting the later would require the ADM to join either the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)-led list or one of the Sunni Arab-led lists. To join an electoral list led by one of the province's big parties means that the ADM would lose its ability to act independently, Adid said. Adid asserted that ADM's independence is what makes it the strongest and most respected Christian party in Ninewa. (Note: The candidate registration period has ended and it would not be possible for ADM to add candidates to any other party's list. End Note.) Adid added that the intentions behind Article 50 were good but the actual law works to the disadvantage of minorities (reftel).

¶4. (C) In addition to Article 50, the ADM faces other barriers to province-wide coordination. For instance, according to Adid and others, the KDP's Pesh merga forces prevent ADM leader Bassim Bello from commuting from his headquarters in Al Qosh, Tel Kaif District to Shaikhan District. He opined that KDP's travel restrictions effectively prevent the ADM from spreading its electoral popularity from its base in Tel Kaif to other Christian areas in Ninewa.

¶5. (C) Comment: The chronic problem with Ninewah's Christian minority groups is that they do not get along

with each other and thus are unable to form an electoral coalition. Although many of the Christian minority's wounds are self-inflicted, Article 50 and KDP political control of Christian areas do impede Christians from converting their percentage of Ninewa's overall population into the maximum number of elected representatives. The election law stipulates one vote per person. Consequently, a Christian voter must either vote for a candidate in the list reserved for Christians or the general list. Therefore, a popular Christian candidate (or a number of middling candidates) competing for the reserved seat may attract many times the number of votes required to win a seat in the general provincial election. The skewing of votes to the candidate competing for the reserved seat leads to a decrease in the overall number of Christian votes cast for candidates competing for seats not reserved for Christians.

¶6. (C) Comment continued: In addition to the electoral impediments imposed by Article 50, Christian political parties face a stark choice if they hope to realistically compete for seats not reserved for Christians: either join the larger KDP or Sunni Arab-led coalitions and sacrifice some independence; or defy KDP-enforced travel restrictions that prevent mobilizing support in different parts of the province. The other minorities of Ninewa face similar challenges.

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